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Cordially

Julie Manierre Mann

Edson



Eads

(Middlesex and Suffolk)

ARMS: Azure, a chevron engrailed between
three leopards' faces argent:

CREST: Leopard's face argent

GENERAL ARMORY
SIR BARNARD BURKE

THE EDSON STORY

BY

JULIE (Edson) MANIERRE MANN

First Printing

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PRINTED BY BRIDGEWATER INDEPENDENT

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Bronze Memorial	<i>THE END</i>

Illustrations — Photographs by Julie Manierre Mann

Sketches by Eveline D. Johnson

THE EDSON STORY

In reviewing the past since Deacon Samuel Edson first established his mills on the little river in West Bridgewater in about 1650, it is meet that grateful acknowledgment should be offered to those first historians who preserved so many of the early records of the family and those of the community in which they had lived for so many generations. Without them we would be poor indeed but, within modern times, research has discovered much of the ancient home of the Edsons in England that has not become generally known and which should be of value to them today.

In the year 1903, Jarvis Bonesteel Edson, of New York City, published a book called the "Edsons in England and America" which was the fruit of many years of unselfish labor and an expenditure of a considerable fortune.

Jarvis Bonesteel Edson, like his forefathers, was a man with a high sense of responsibility towards his fellow man, and especially for the integrity of the name that he bore, which prompted him to undertake the task of an up-to-date genealogy and history of the family.

A successful inventor and associated, among other things, with Thomas Edison in the Domestic Telegraph Company in which they were both trustees, he was fortunately able to carry on such an undertaking where the immensity of the subject would have been impossible for others to accomplish. A navy man in active service, conscientious churchman and philanthropist, he, after a lifetime of creative endeavor, had finally come to the defense of the family name of Edson which had been put in question by early tradition and of the Coat-of-Arms with which it was associated.

Let us now quote from the preface of his book, "The Edsons in England and America," in which he says that:

EDSONS IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA

PREFACE

The only work published in this country respecting the Edsons of New England and their extraction was printed in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1864, and entitled "A Genealogical Account of the Edsons Early Settled in Bridgewater, with Appendices". This contribution of valuable memorabilia is a summary of traditions and facts compiled successively by Captain Josiah Edson (1682-1762), Elijah Hayward (his great-grandson), the Rev. Theodore Edson, S.T.D., and John Edson (his brother) and Nahum Mitchell (author of the History of the Early Settlement of Bridgewater).

The conclusions advanced in the initial paragraph and the two foot-notes on the name Edson being "a contraction from a word of three or more syllables", and the improbability of finding a native of England bearing it as a surname, were generally accepted until recently, as determining the uselessness of all further attempts to ascertain anything to the contrary. The allegation that "it is certainly not found in any book of heraldry" was evidently left unchallenged at that time for want of enlightenment, although there was then among the priceless heraldic manuscripts of Queen's College, Oxford, one in which the name of "Thomas Edson of Adderbury" was so written. As printed in the Lowell pamphlet, the paragraph reads:

"The name of Edson is most probably a contraction of Edwardson, Edmonson, Edwinson, or that of some other name of three syllables beginning with Ed and ending with son. Previous to the year 1600, the word Edson as a personal appellation is not to be found in the English vocabulary of proper names; and it is much doubted if it can be found in England, unless connected with some person in or from the United States. It is certainly not found in any book of heraldry, wherein are entered the family names of nearly every other person who has emigrated from England and settled in the American Colonies. Whether this traction was made or adopted by SAMUEL EDSON, the common ancestor of all that name in this country, it is impossible to ascertain."

This pamphlet, referred to above, suggests that the name Edson may be a corruption of Addison. "It is, in fact, often pronounced Addison and Eddison by most uneducated foreigners who have occasion to use the name, and they often confirm the orthography thereto. The fact the name can be clearly traced to him, and no further, is strongly corroborative of the opinion that its present form was assumed in his time."

The historical proof of the groundlessness of these suppositions appeared necessary, and, readily perceiving the value of it, I secured the services of an experienced gentleman to prosecute for me adequate searches

for information concerning the ancestry and posterity of the Edsons in England and America that would serve for an authentic history of the Edson Family.

This investigation in different parts of England, particularly in the Library of the British Museum in London, and the registry and probate office in Lichfield and York, examinations of parish registers at Adderbury in Oxfordshire, at Knaresborough, Whixley, and Easingwold in Yorkshire, at Bedworth, Beckswell, Over Whiteacre, Nether Whiteacre, Kingsbury, and Tilloughley in Warwickshire, together with interviews with James Edson at Ottringham, George Edson at Pickering, and Joseph A. Edson at Otley, in Yorkshire, were, as will be seen, richly rewarded. The noteworthy success attending the researches in this country also revealed many interesting historical particulars of the careers of certain Edsons early identified with the political affairs of the colonists of New England. Letters of inquiry to members of Edson families residing in different parts of the United States were the means of eliciting much of the serviceable data of the genealogical division of this work.

My purpose in publishing so comprehensive a history as this of the Edsons in England and America was mainly to enlighten and benefit their living descendants with such knowledge, of the conscientious, stalwart, patriotic, and godly character of their ancestors, as might impress them with an abiding sense of their obligation to be men as indomitable, diligent, public-spirited, and honored as their forefathers were in their day and generation. The embellishment of the historical part of the work with engravings of places and objects still distinguishing the seats of the ancestral homes of Edsons in England and America was prompted by a consideration of the enjoyment they might afford to persons desirous of acquiring all the knowledge to be obtained regarding the natural and artificial features of the landscapes environing the habitations of their early kinsmen.

It was my good fortune to become the possessor of one (No. 26) of the fifty-seven copies that were printed in 1893, of the Transcript of the Old Parish Register of the Parish Church of St. Mary and All Saints, Tilloughley, County Warwick, 1538-1653, containing the entry of the baptism of Samuel Edson, son of Thomas Edson, on September 5, 1613, as well as entries of baptisms, marriages, and deaths of others and earlier ancestral kinsfolk.

The Reverend Arthur Bicknelt Stevenson, Vicar of Tilloughley Church since May 8, 1888, kindly sent me for souvenir canes, two pieces of a broken branch of the venerable yew which has long been a picturesque feature of the ancient churchyard. To this obliging and courteous clergyman I am greatly indebted for the gift of the much-prized mementos and

for the pains taken by him to provide me with desired photographs of the interior and exterior of the church, in the sacred precincts of which, four centuries ago, more than one of my ancestors had worshipped.

EDSON COAT-OF-ARMS

Referring to the origin of the name, the ancient family of Ead, whose Anglo-Saxon descendants were distinguished by such diversely spelled names as Eade, Ed, Ede, Eedes, Eading, Eding, Edson and Edison, early acquired distinction in Britain through its male representatives by martial prowess and knightly valor. "There never was a reigning king of that country" according to a long-current tradition, "that was not served by one or more of them mounted, from the coming of the first progenitor, titled Ead, into Britain, to the end of the Middle Ages." Being well born and of official rank, they, when afield in war, had coats of mail, helmets and shields, on each of which the armorial ensigns of the family were distinctively displayed.

These designative emblems, heraldically titled their arms, had descended from an early point of time to each successive generation, by right of inheritance, and not by special grant or confirmation, for they were possessed long before King Richard III founded by letters patent, on March 2, 1483, "The College of Arms" or as it is more commonly called, "The Herald's College."

"Notwithstanding the numerous traditions relative to the granting of arms by monarchs in very early times," says Lower, "it seems to have been the general practice before the reigns of Richard II (1377-1399) and Henry IV (1399-1413) for persons of rank to assume what ensigns they chose. But those monarchs regarding themselves as the true 'fountains of honour' granted or took them away by royal edict. The exclusive right of the kings to this privilege was long in question, and Dame Julyan Berners, so late as 1486, declares that 'armys bi a mannys auctorite (if no other man have not borne theym afore) be of strength enough.'

The family arms of the Eads, Eades, Eds, Edes and Eedes, as described by Sir Barnard Burke, Ulster King of Arms, the distinguished author of "The General Armory of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales", are azure a chevron engraved between three leopards' faces argent." Of the symbolic meaning of the colors of the shield and the chevron, the azure, is said to signify "courtesy and discretion" and the argent or silver "chastity, charity and a clear conscience." The leopards' (or lions') faces, styled common charges, are accepted as expressing "fearlessness and courage." The chevron, known as an ordinary charge, is regarded as implying military service; its shape being that of a bow or arch of a saddle. The engrailed or scalloped border of the chevron differed as that bearing from one otherwise edged.

Authority: *The Curiosities of Heraldry* by Mark Anthony Lower, London, 1845.

The early use by the Ead family of a "leopard's face" as its crest is regarded as heraldic evidence of its ancient distinction, inasmuch as that emblem formed one of the principal charges of the family coat-of-arms.

"The right to bear a crest," says Cussans, "was considered more honourable than that of coat armory; for to the latter a noble would succeed by birth, but to obtain the former he must have been a knight in actual service." — *Handbook of Heraldry* by John E. Cussans, London 1893, page 186.

That representatives of the Ead family had repeatedly rendered such service to successive sovereigns of England is not duly affirmed by its long perpetuated tradition but also by the emblematic chevron embellishing its escutcheon.

In time the arms became modified in some of their secondary charges to represent the different branches of the family, living in different shires or counties — and those given by Burke represent the arms in Suffolk and Middlesex, while ours are those of Warwickshire.

CONTEMPORARY COMMENT

Reverting from the past to the immediate present, on June 10, 1948, in the Xth article of a most interesting series on the "Story of an Old Town" appearing in the *Bridgewater Independent* by the Rev. William Lord McKinney, pastor of the First Congregational Church (Unitarian) in Bridgewater, who says in the second paragraph, apparently relying on the early erroneous account:

"In the spelling of the names we find also an involved problem difficult to solve. Take the rather famous Edson family as an illustration. Deacon Edson came here from Salem and was made a proprietor and built the first mill. Yet it is impossible to trace any English ancestry, and the conclusion is drawn that Edson was possibly an abbreviation of Edwardson, or from some similar name. Among the various biographies of the Edson families, only one traced back to any English source, and in that record there is mention of an infant, *Samuel Edson*, baptized in Fillongley, Sept. 5, 1613, but no reference to the family."

As this is verily the date and place of our Deacon Samuel Edson's baptism, it seems a pity that this unnamed authority became discouraged at the very threshold of the ancient church and spiritual home of the Edsons for many generations.

As this is not accredited to be an age of miracles, the very fact that

there was an infant, Samuel Edson, might have been considered proof enough that there *was* in truth an Edson family somewhere adjacent the venerable old edifice of St. Mary and All Saints Fillongley Church, County Warwick.

According to the record, Samuel's parents were Thomas and Elizabeth (Copson) Edson of Fillongley.

The entry upon the roll of members of St. Anne's Guild at Knowle, in 1494, of the names of Henry and Katharine Edson of Fillongley, reveals the fact that not only Adderbury, in Oxfordshire, but also Fillongley, in Warwickshire, less than 35 miles distant one from the other, were places of contemporaneous abode of the earliest identifiable ancestors of the Edsons in England.

Deacon Samuel Edson

Upon that premise let us return to the arrival in 1651 of Samuel Edson in the Pilgrim settlement of Duxbury Plantation from which Bridgewater was eventually carved.

*"How and by whom Samuel Edson was influenced to make Duxbury Plantation his second place of settlement there is no tradition nor writing to afford information. The name of William Brett, one of the original proprietors, a descendant of ancestors living in the vicinity of Fillongley, Warwickshire, in the sixteenth century, may be a clue to the discovery of an answer to the pertinent interrogation. From him *Samuel Edson* appears to have obtained his first proprietary right to a share in the lands of the plantation as is disclosed by the deed, bearing date of 'Dec. 10, anno domini, 1652,' which was witnessed by Arthur Hains, his H mark, William Brett, Margaret Brett, her mark M. and acknowledged by Constant Southworth, assistant, on 23 July 1660.

*From *Edsons in England and America* by Jarvis Bonesteel Edson, P. 98.

The Constant Southworth before whom this deed was acknowledged, was one of the original proprietors of Bridgewater, and he, with Miles Standish and Samuel Nash, took the deed of Ousamequin, the Indian chief, now better known as Massasoit.

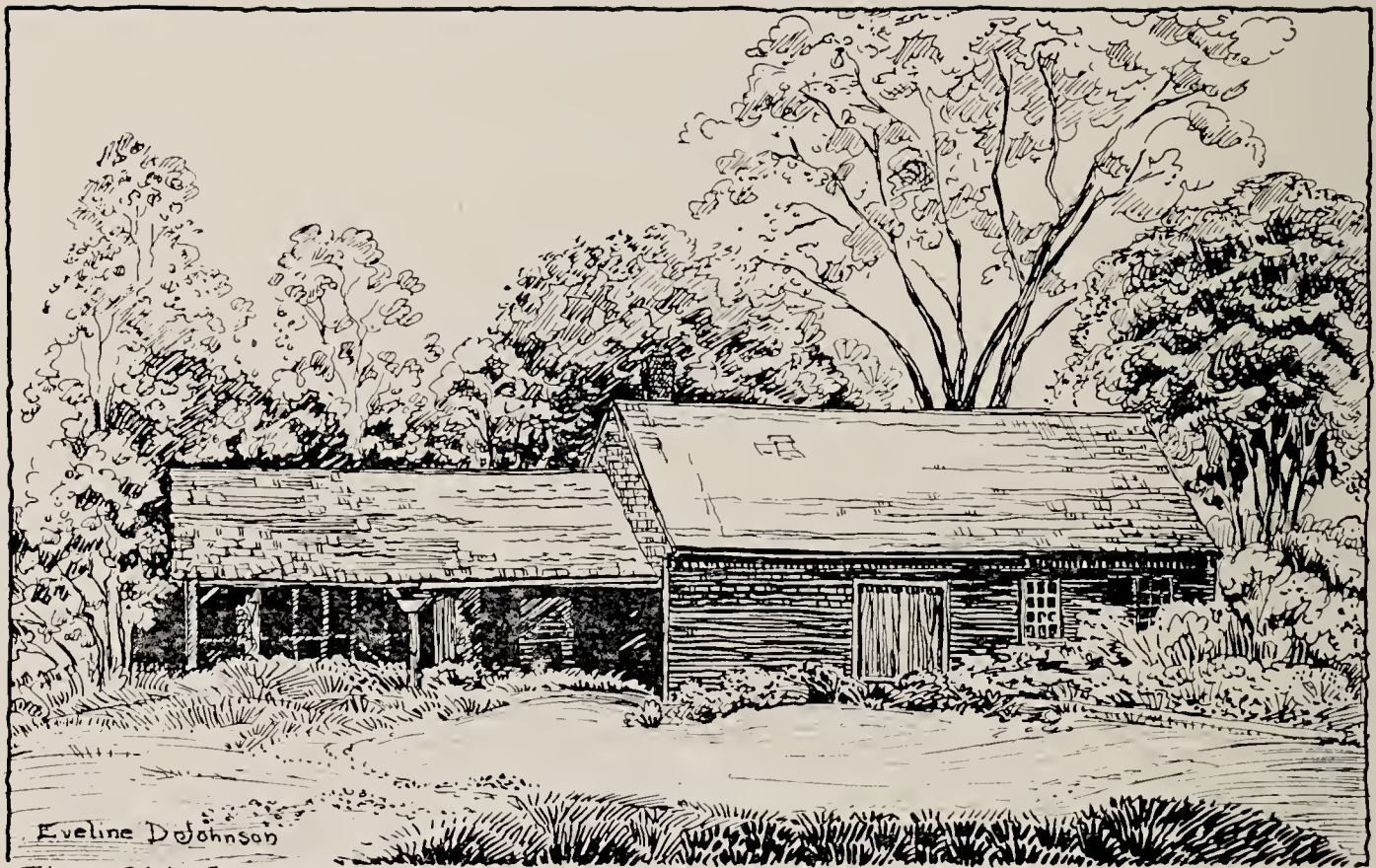
Being one of the proprietors of the town of Bridgewater, Samuel Edson, in 1654, was apportioned 20 acres of upland and 2½ acres of meadow in that year's division of the undivided land. As evidenced by the tenor of the following deed, "dated May ye 17, anno Domini, 1656", he became the owner of another proprietary right in the lands of the Town, and the possessor of a house, two sawmills and two houselots.

Tradition says that the two sawmills occupied in part the site of the



Artist's Sketch of Samuel Edson's House

WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



The Old Grist Mill

Artist's Sketch of GRIST-MILL
Owned by Samuel Edson
WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS

sawmill now at West Bridgewater, on the north bank of the "Town River", between South and Main Streets.

Perceiving by the patronage given his saw-mills that he could in like manner personally benefit the people of the town by erecting, near the flume feeding his saw-mills, a grist-mill, Samuel Edson, about the year 1660, undertook the building of one. Importing from England such parts of the iron machinery as were needed to operate a run of stones, he had a pair properly made from a good quality of millstone-grit, quarried not far west of the settlement. Fragments of the first bedstone and runner that were used for many years by him are still to be seen (in 1903) imbedded in the ground on the site of the original grist-mill. Tradition relates that the proprietors of the town, desiring to afford him a suitable attestation of their appreciation of his public spirit and enterprise in erecting the first grist-mill within its bounds, presented him with a full and complete share in its land. The grist-mill continued in his possession until Jan. 15, 1688-9, when he conveyed it, with other property to his five daughters. In this deed given them, it is styled his "corn-mill".

NOTE: The deed was not recorded until April 19, 1736. "A Genealogical Account of the Edsons early settled in Bridgewater, with Appendices. Lowell, 1864, pages 6-7."

Memorial Park

But that was 46 years ago and since then the group of old mills that had once served their vital mission had been abandoned and had become a menace in the center of the town. So following the 1929 Depression, the government had them removed and through the W.P.A. created in their place the beautiful Memorial Park, unique in its charm and full of the associations of the past generations.

These were not alone of the Edson clan, for other mills of primitive industries followed, including the iron and ore foundry of the Ames where they melted down the iron ore which they dug up from the bottom of neighboring ponds and refined and made into shovels during the days of the Revolution.

As their large square stone will testify, which stands near the great millstones once belonging to Deacon Samuel Edson, both now sharing the place of honor in the center of Memorial Park.

Great credit is due those farsighted ones who contributed to make of

this venerable but crumbling spot a place of beauty and recreation and our thanks go to Mrs. Eveline D. Johnson and to Mr. Herbert E. Bryant as personally known to me. It is surrounded by a low rustic fence and the whole park is finished in this charming woodsy effect.

The area of the park extends to the eastward along the banks of the Town river for many acres, both above and below the beautiful three-arched stone bridge, which is one of the north and south thoroughfares of the town.

Above this bridge is a wide, low waterfall and the probable site of Deacon Edson's mills besides a spillway or sluice carrying much of the water down a long, narrow rock-walled runway, past the bridge, and on the north side of the park which is virtually made a small island thereby.

For this spillway fed some of the other mills there and fell over a mill wheel into a small but beautiful pool and thence back into the river again.

There are perhaps three spillways and an underpass where the foundry workers carried their dippers full of the melted ore to the molds which they filled and left ready to cool.

The park has many beautiful trees and a lawn well kept with picnic pavilion of rock and rustic fittings.

On a lower level is a large open field following along the river to the "Pulpit Rock" where their first minister, Rev. James Keith, preached his first sermon. Standing on the large, flat rock, the young minister faced an eager congregation gathered in the meadow to attend him, after having been without a spiritual leader for some ten or more years. With the placid stream flowing behind him and the open sky above, it must have been a memorable occasion for the little community.



Site of Deacon Samuel Edson's Mills

MEMORIAL PARK

WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



Deacon Samuel Edson's Mill Stones

MEMORIAL PARK

WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



Samuel Edson's Mill Stones on site of his Mills

MEMORIAL PARK

WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



The Ames Shovel Foundation Stone

MEMORIAL PARK

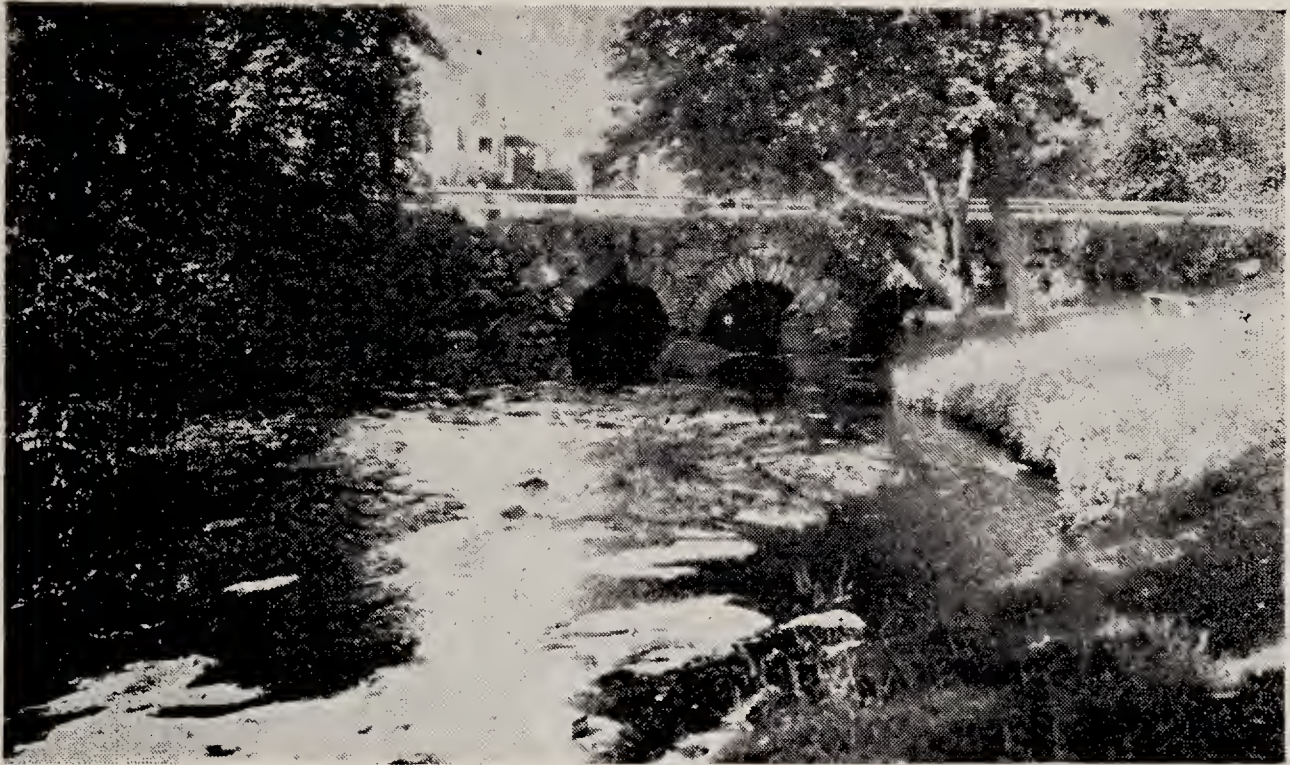
WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



The Falls — Site of Deacon Samuel Edson's Mills

MEMORIAL PARK

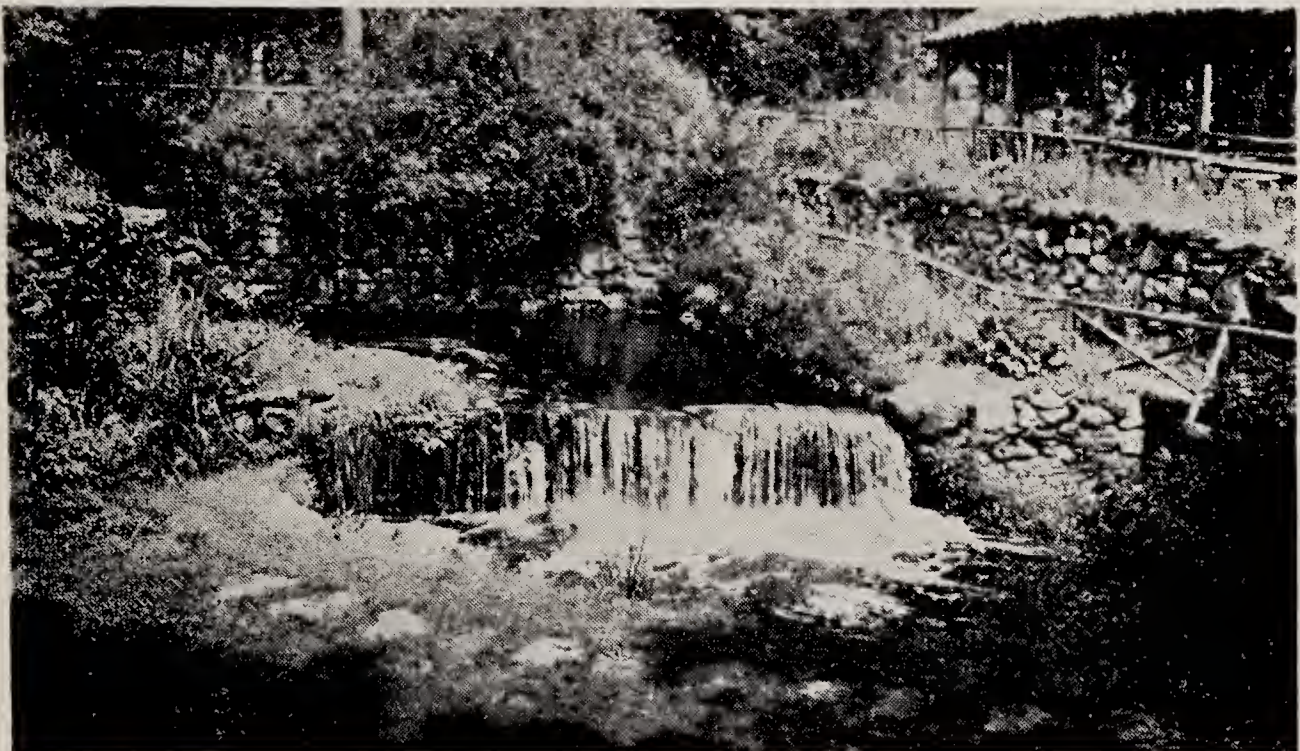
WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



The Arched Bridge

MEMORIAL PARK

WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



The Mill-Race belonging to Samuel Edson's Mills

MEMORIAL PARK

WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



Town River — Looking upstream

WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



Spillway — Site of Deacon Samuel Edson's Mill

MEMORIAL PARK

WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



“PULPIT ROCK”

Where Rev. James Keith Preached the First Sermon



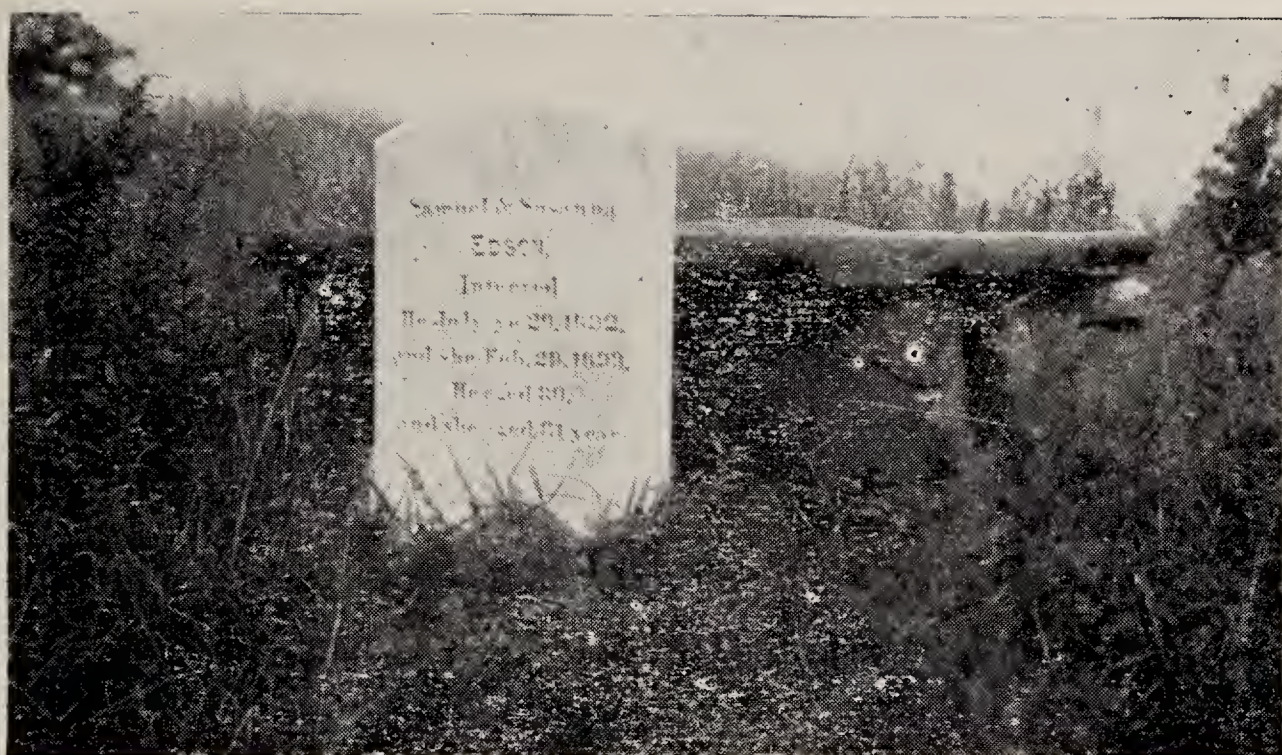
Nuncketesset or Town River

WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS

Rev. James Keith

But no account of the early Edsons can be written without special mention of this very young minister, Rev. James Keith, who was only eighteen years of age when he was recommended by the Rev. Increase Mather in 1662 for the post at Bridgewater. Fresh from his studies in Aberdeen, Scotland, and of a noble family, this youth was to give to his community a long lifetime of devoted service. His broader spiritual viewpoint in his treatment of the Indians, he was outstanding for his times, as exemplified by his intercession for the life of the wife and child of King Philip when they were captured after the death of King Philip which terminated that disastrous war.

In time, Rev. Keith married Susanna, the daughter of Deacon Samuel Edson, and now their graves of both generations may be seen side by side in the old South Street Cemetery in West Bridgewater.



Graves of Deacon Samuel and Susanna (*Orcutt*) Edson

SOUTH STREET CEMETERY

WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASS.



Graves of Deacon Samuel and Susanna (*Orcutt*) Edson
and Rev. James and Susanna (*Edson*) Keith

SOUTH STREET CEMETERY

WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASS.



Old Episcopal Cemetery

MAIN STREET, BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



Family Lot of Samuel Edson, III

OLD EPISCOPAL CEMETERY

BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS

Samuel Edson, III

On the main road going to Bridgewater proper, one passes on the left, or east side of the street, another cemetery with rock fence enclosure, where the third generation of Edsons' graves are locked behind a high iron fence. This is where *Samuel Edson III* is buried as it is on the site next to where his first Trinity Church once stood. His gift of fourteen acres has since been sold and the proceeds contributed to build the third, or present Trinity Church on Main Street, Bridgewater.

This is the *Samuel Edson* who, though brought up in his grandfather's Puritan Church, returned to the Episcopal form, which in that day was a courageous thing to do and an act which has provoked unsolicited comments both past and present.

Referring to the historians, the Rev. Theodore Edson and Elijah Hayward, who wrote "A Genealogical Account of the Edsons Early Settled in Bridgewater" in 1864, they say in the appendix No. 1 that:

"*Samuel Edson 3rd*, the father of this family (of 13), was reputed an honest man and an exemplary Christian. This certainly is much praise, and more scarcely need be said of a man moving in the ordinary walks of life. But there are circumstances of his case, which, though not blazoned at the time, yet upon investigation, show in a beautiful, if not glorious height, the fairness, the unobtrusive honesty, the strong conscientious truthfulness of his mind.

"The religion of the town was Puritanism in its most determined phase. Deacon Edson (1) and Rev. Mr. Keith were representative men. Their families and numerous friendly connections gave direction and tone to the religious influence of the Town. This influence was all one way in the very focus of which Samuel 3rd received his early education and no small part of which he was the only son of his father (Samuel 2), the stem of his house, inheriting property and position in the community so decidedly and powerfully Puritan. The fairness of mind is remarkable which could receive the evidence and appreciate the claims of the Church of England. It was scarcely less than martyrdom for himself and his family to yield to the convictions of his mind and to adopt a religion so hateful to his fathers and his friends and contemporaries. No wonder that the process was gradual, that his children were trained from infancy to manhood in the principles of the Church before he or they felt prepared to break off entirely from the standing order and to take decided measures for the church. They, who have observed the connection of modesty with an active, enlightened, and inoffensive conscience, will not wonder that the renouncing of caste and consider-

ation with his fellows was without ostentation or complaint. Never were advantages more quietly, more understandingly, or more satisfactorily relinquished. They found an equivalent and were contented. He did not despise the benefits of his religion he forfeited, but was paid and overpaid in the reward of the faithful. No wonder that his generous gift was not trumpeted to his credit, and his fame embellished as the Founder of Trinity Church. No wonder that his friends who hated the religion should not have applauded the charity. Not that even Puritanism could find a stain on his morals, nor say worse of his religious character than that he was a thorough understanding churchman. Great certainty was the trial of his faith. Most satisfactory the test of his sincerity. His path as that of the just shows by its own shining light his conscientiousness and integrity. He did what he could. Nor can we believe his offering was unacceptable to God, his Savior, His children and numerous posterity scattered far and wide over land, have proved to a great extent seeds of the Church which he so ardently loved and to which he so faithfully sacrificed. In view of his patient carrying out the deep and intelligent convictions of his conscience, in circumstances so influential and untoward, we are tempted to quote: 'An honest man's the noblest work of God,' and we confess the admiration of our hearts in view of this beautiful instance. Of an honesty so meekly stern and patiently straight-forward, and our grateful satisfaction with the maturing of the fruits thereof, which we who live after are privileged to witness."

After this gracious passage there is no need to add or detract from the tribute offered Samuel Edson and his good wife, Mary Dean, daughter of Benjamin Dean of Taunton, Mass. Their justification, if one is needed, lies in the fact that their descendants were conspicuous for their generosity toward Trinity Church during the years that followed, in which it has been necessary to rebuild the church twice, is acknowledgment enough of their gratitude and concurrence in the founding of the Episcopal Church in Bridgewater by their forefathers.



Trinity Episcopal Church

BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS

Samuel Edson, III, Founded and Endowed This Church



COL. JOSIAH EDSON'S HOUSE
Known as the "Tory" House

57 CENTRAL SQUARE

BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS

Colonel Josiah Edson

True to an idealism or trait of character, which I do not blush to claim as a family inheritance which soon brings us to another Edson who also had the courage of his convictions, Col. Josiah Edson, the redoubtable Tory who has left his mark upon even Bridgewater of today. He lived in the house now owned by William B. and Alice (Atwood) Hanson at 57 Central Square, Bridgewater. It has been called the Tory House ever since the days of the American Revolution.

In the great struggle that confronted them, Colonel Edson, who represented the English crown as head of the local militia, felt his responsibility to that crown to which he had pledged his allegiance.

Trouble began in the early days before the American cause had crystallized into a dignified resistance, sustained by the convictions of the inalienable rights of the people when the patriot mobs regularly pulled down the British flag before his door and the indignant Colonel as regularly put it back again!

But let us review the tragic tale through the words of the early historians, who, even in that austere period, evinced admiration for his character and pity for his fate, as follows:

"Although distinguished for strong natural abilities and extensive literary achievements, Josiah Edson studied none of the learned professions, but devoted most of his time to agricultural pursuits. Besides sustaining many town and parish offices, he represented Bridgewater twelve years in the General Court at Boston, commencing in 1746 and ending in 1773. No man was more highly esteemed and honored by the town, antecedent to the revolutionary troubles, when he took a decided stand for the crown, by which course he lost the flattering popularity he had acquired and long enjoyed.

"Col. Edson was neither a good nor a successful politician, or he would have observed a more prudent, judicious course for himself. A loyalist from principle and habit, as most of the eminent and distinguished colonists were at that day, and having repeatedly taken the oath of allegiance to the British crown, and not believing that he could be released from its obligations by any act of usurpation of government, he could not conscientiously conceive in any hostile measures on the part of the colonies; yet no more sincerely lamented or more heartily disapproved of the conduct of the Parliament as unjust and inexpedient; though he did not doubt its strict right according to the theory of the English Constitution to tax the colonists in all cases whatsoever.

“Besides, he was solemnly impressed with the idea that the power of England was irresistible and that any attempt to oppose its measures by arms, however odious those measures might be, would result in defeat, disgrace and the most abject submission. He was then a colonel of a full regiment of the militia, with nearly all the rank and file of which he was personally acquainted and on terms of social and friendly intercourse; and such had been his previous great popularity, founded on meritorious conduct, there can be no doubt that had he espoused the cause of its colonies, he would have been among the foremost in either civil or military rank during the Revolution. But, unfortunately for himself, he chose the other side, and incurred the deep and abiding odium of being one of the ‘19 rescinders.’ ”

(NOTE: Colonel Edson was one of the 17 rescinders who agreed to the demands of England against the colonies in 1768) and one of the 36 Mandamus Councillors, (NOTE: Loyalists to the Crown so-called) in 1774.

“Very few of his near connections, if any, and of his personal friends in the town, approved his course, and such was the political excitement against him and the threatening aspects of the time he felt himself compelled for his personal security to seek the protection of the British Army in Boston; and in the autumn of 1774, he left his residence, separated himself from his family and friends, and became identified with the enemy of that town.

“In the early part of 1776, he accompanied the British Army from Boston to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and from thence to Newport and Long Island, where he died in 1778, depressed in spirits and broken-hearted. He had become convinced of his errors and his contrition was deep and oppressive, so much so that death was to him a welcome messenger. Two events connected with his adhesion to the cause of England prove the high estimation in which he had been held by his fellow citizens and former associates.

“A few weeks before he joined the British in Boston, a large number of his townsmen and acquaintances, many of them young men, surrounded his dwelling house in the nighttime in a tumultuous manner for the purpose of arresting him and taking him before the Committee of Safety. Their noise having awakened him, he rose, opened the window of his chamber, and demanded the object of their visit. As soon as they had informed him, he dressed himself, came downstairs, opened the front door of his house, and said to them: ‘Walk in, gentlemen.’ Not one advanced or offered to enter his dwelling. He then said to them: ‘Why do you not come in? You wish to take me to the Committee of Safety. If you insist upon it, I

will go with you, but you act inconsistently. You claim the liberty of enjoying your own opinions, and at the same time would deprive me of the exercise of mine. Is this right? If you think so, take me with you. But why have you assembled here in the night time, in a riotous manner, when you all know that I have never concealed myself from your notice and observation? Were you ashamed to approach me in the light of Heaven?' "

"Such had been their previous respect and esteem for his person and character that after a few minutes' consultation among themselves, they returned to their homes without any further disturbance or molestation of him.

"NOTE: When he had completed his arrangements for joining the British in Boston, and it was known when he would leave his residence for that purpose, and had commenced his journey on horseback, about one hundred of his townsmen, many of whom were armed, assembled on each side of the bridge in West Bridgewater, over which he would pass, with a view of arresting him as a Tory, for trial and punishment. When he came in sight of the bridge and saw the formidable array of men met to oppose his progress, he walked his horse moderately, and approaching them in his usual complacent and dignified manner, accosted them as follows:

" 'Good morning, gentlemen. I am as much the friend of your rights and liberties as you are yourselves, but you are engaged in an importunate cause and must be defeated. You will repent of your conduct, mark my words this day. Goodbye, gentlemen,' and he passed through their lines, not one of them molesting him nor even seizing the reins of his horse. Had he manifested any fear or much excitement, he would no doubt have been arrested, but he had long possessed their confidence and until the commencement of the difficulties between the colonies and the mother country, was by far the most prominent and popular man in the Town. (Received this information from Col. Edward Howard and others who witnessed the transaction.)

The character of Col. Josiah Edson in private life was most amiable and virtuous, and that of his public career was marked by policy more than principle, yet when considered in the aggregate, however, much may be found to be commended, there is more to be admired. Its greatest defect, although a brave man, was that of timidity. He had a most exalted opinion of the order, discipline, and courage of the British Army, and of the skill of its officers, and underestimated the resources, enterprise and genius of the colonies. He believed there were no troops in the world that could successfully contend with the British grenadiers; hence he was firm in the faith that any effort on the part of the colonies to coerce England would

be unavailing, and that defeat and disgrace would be inevitable.

“It is not improbable, therefore, that his political course in the great controversy was more influenced by his fears than by any voluntary choice. The splendors of royalty had not dazzled his mind nor tempted his aspirations for fame. He had neither his fortune to make, nor honorable distinction to win, for he had acquired both in an eminent degree. At the time he fled for protection to the British Army, the idea of colonial independence had not been discussed as a question, seriously proposed, and had he taken no part in the exciting debates of the day, but had given his attention only to his private concerns, as many others of the same views and apprehensions did, it is more than probable that after the 4th of July, 1776, he would cordially have supported that grave and dignified measure. But he had imprudently placed himself in a position from which he could not recede; he had fixed his own destiny of grief, sorrow, and repentance, had been proscribed and banished for his political opinions, and had become a wanderer, an outlaw, and an exile from home, and from all the endearments of social and domestic life.

“Subsequently, though before his death in September 1778, without notice, without any specification of crime and without even the form of a trial or an opportunity for defense, by a public law, in which he was named, with 307 others, his large estate was confiscated and he was forbidden to return to the colony without leave, under penalty of transportation and imprisonment, and if he should afterwards return without leave, he was to be punished as a felon by death.

“A Committee was appointed and directed by resolve of the General Court, passed Sept. 23, 1779, to make sale of the confiscated estate of Josiah Edson, Esq., late of Bridgewater, an absentee. Thus was he made a victim to his loyalty and personal integrity, without having taken arms against the colonies, a retribution repulsive to both justice and mercy, painful, cruel in its effects and greatly disproportioned to his offence, more consonant with the tyranny of crowned despotism than with the benign principles of a free Republican government.

NOTE: His property was purchased and possessed by neighbors of more favored political opinions. His widow lived to suffer from poverty and is said to have been assisted by the Town.”

There was a time when this dramatic story was reenacted for the benefit of the populace, but it met with so little response from the descendants of the early inhabitants that, abashed by a silent reproach, it was discontinued.

And so it is, that the Tory House and its tragic history, has finally

become a treasured souvenir of the past and the memory of the brave Tory who suffered martyrdom has been hallowed and dear to the hearts of his native town.

It is especially a tragic epic in which the Edson clan can take solemn pride for, in the last analysis, it is a tribute to one who has had the courage of his convictions even unto death and bears an inspiration regardless of political persuasion to all men and for all time.

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IN HONORED MEMORY OF
DEACON SAMUEL EDSON

BAPT SEPT 5, 1613
FILLONGLEY, WARWICKSHIRE, ENGLAND

AN ORIGINAL PROPRIETER OF BRIDGEWATER
HE, WITH 56 SHARE HOLDERS INCLUDING
MILES STANDISH AND "GOODMAN ALDEN"
BOUGHT THE LAND MAR. 23, 1649
FROM CHIEF MASSASOIT—
THE "WHITE MAN'S FRIEND TO
THE PILGRIM FATHERS"

DEACON EDSON BUILT THE FIRST GRIST
MILL IN BRIDGEWATER, ON THIS SITE
WHERE THESE MILL-STONES TESTIFY
TO HIS COURAGE AND FORESIGHT

A DEACON IN THE PURITAN CHURCH
PROMINENT LEADER IN THE AFFAIRS OF
THE COMMUNITY UNTIL HIS DEATH
JULY 19, 1692

Bronze Memorial

In closing, the Edson Clan acknowledge their indebtedness to those first hardy pioneers whose hard won fruits we have inherited — by placing a bronze marker on the mill-stones once used by Deacon Samuel Edson to grind the grain of our forefathers.

In Honored Memory of

DEACON SAMUEL EDSON

Bapt. Sept. 5, 1613

Fillongley, Warwickshire, England

An original proprietor of Bridgewater

he, with 56 Shareholders including

Myles Standish and “Goodman” Alden

bought the land Mar. 23, 1649

from Chief Massasoit

the “White Man’s Friend to

the Pilgrim Fathers”

Deacon Edson built the first grist

mill in Bridgewater, on this site

where these mill-stones testify

to his courage and foresight.

A deacon in the Puritan Church,

prominent leader in the affairs of

the community until his death

July 19, 1692

The proceeds of “The Edson Story” will be contributed towards the installation of this bronze memorial honoring our common ancestor, Deacon Samuel Edson.

Acknowledgment: The author sincerely appreciates the never failing assistance given her by Mrs. A. C. Snow, Forest Street, West Bridgewater, secretary of the Old Bridgewater Historical Society.

